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Salt Flats

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Salt Flats · *Mary Hower*

Two of us women in a rattly Datsun—
no radio, fuel gauge stuck on F even when empty—
driving through where you can't tell
if you've gotten anywhere: Nevada,
the test state, ulcerous, all this land
slatting into the rearview through the dress rack,
purple, your hit eyelid just healing.

You say, "Don't make a big production of this:
I caused it. You don't know what it's like
living with me—my moods, my temper."
Months of your letters,
I wanted to shield you from him.
"Don't confuse me with a victim—I had a choice,
I chose to stay."
What if I came to get you? I wrote,
bring you back west,
thinking I was your rescuer—but it's you
shifting gears while I press the clutch to the floor,
the same stubbornness that kept you with him
willing us on now.

It washes out, this road,
closes to one lane, next exit sixty miles away,
no bushes, no relief, the salt shaker sun blinding—
what if we went off the shoulder,
would we sink in the salt, crystals cutting our skin?
And you saying you can't stand it,
pulling off,
pulling his ring off, resistant as uncorking
champagne, and throw it to the flats,
turning white, marrying salt.